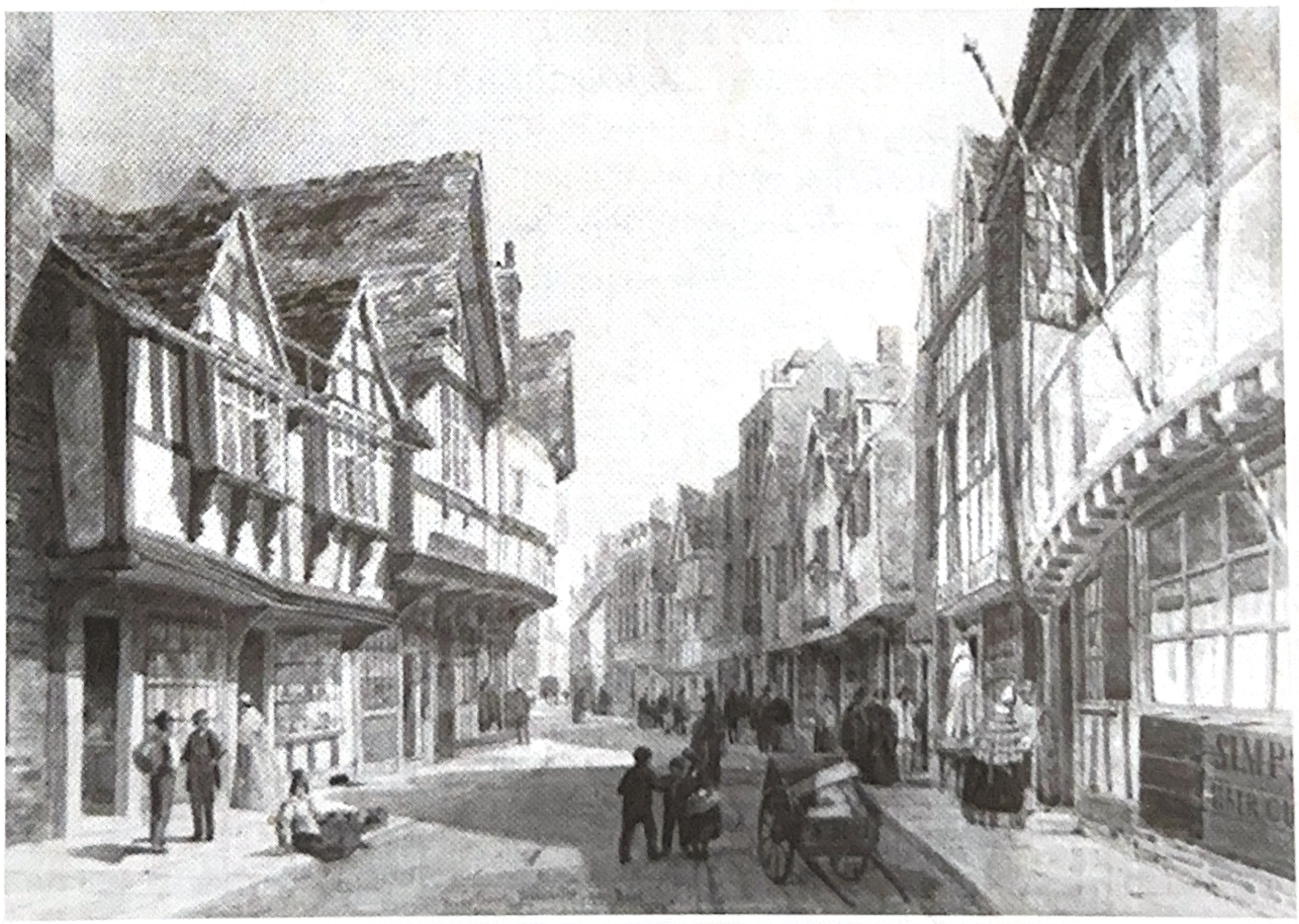
THE NATIONAL TRUST

THE GREYFRIARS

WORCESTER



Friar Street, Worcester in 1859 by Thomas Shotter Boys.

THE GREYFRIARS

WORCESTER

Greyfriars and its Owners

Greyfriars and its neighbouring buildings in Friar Street provide a singular opportunity to view a medieval thoroughfare. Its appearance has changed little since 1859 when Thomas Shotter Boys painted the watercolour which hangs in the Library.

The house itself, built about 1480, is a remarkable specimen of a late medieval townhouse of timber-frame construction. The restoration that age has made necessary has been sensitively carried out to preserve the character of the building. The relatively recent name Greyfriars refers to the Franciscan monastery which flourished on an adjacent site until its suppression as part of the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16th century. The last of the monastic buildings was demolished in 1822.

The initials 'T.G.' in the jetty brackets framing the entrance from the street would appear to stand for Thomas Grene, a wealthy brewer who had the house built. He was High Bailiff in 1493 and 1497. His will requires part of the proceeds from the sale of his property to pay for masses to be said for his soul at St Martin's Church and at the Friar's Minor. The house has seen many owners and tenants since that date, perhaps the most interesting being the Street family who lived there from about 1570. The Streets were a Worcester family of some note. George Street, an affluent brewer, became Mayor of Worcester in 1635 but, being a staunch Royalist, he lost his position in 1642. He died the following year, and the year after that his widow was carried off by the plague. Greyfriars was left to their youngest son John, then a minor, whose interests were scrupulously looked after by his elder brother, Thomas.

Thomas Street, who was born in 1625, left Oxford University before taking a degree in order to live at Greyfriars with his 13-year-old brother John. Thomas became a successful barrister, reaching the pinnacle of his fame (or infamy) in James II's reign. He filled many important offices, was Town Clerk and Recorder of Worcester, and Member for the city in five parliaments between 1659 and 1681. The Puritans tried to oust him from his seat in 1659 on the charge that he used profane language in the chamber. The Committee of Privileges, however, was satisfied that the

strongest oath he had been heard to utter was 'by my faith and trothe' and acquitted him. But the next time he was involved in a matter of national concern the outcome was not so satisfactory. Sir Thomas Street – he had been knighted in 1681 – was the only one of twelve judges who pronounced against James II's claim to grant dispensation from the Test Act, which was aimed at keeping Roman Catholics out of official positions.

Richard Maris, a local baker, bought the lease of the house in 1699. He lived in the south part of the building but began the subdivision of the premises – a process which went on until recent times. In 1825 his descendant sold out to the Georges who had rented part of the house for much of the 18th century. Daniel George built the row of cottages known as George's Yard about 1830 and from 1842 to 1879 part of the house became the Old Oak Inn. In 1849 the house was released to the mortgagee's son whose executor sold it in 1871 to Henry Schaeffer, a German refugee. Schaeffer was sharply criticised by Noakes the historian for cutting the building up into shops. In 1883 he sold the frontage divided into five units to Thomas Allen, clothier, for £2,200. There were thirteen dwellings in the yard behind, with workshop, coachhouse and stable as well. Spackman (in his *Ancient Buildings of Worcester*, published in 1913), records that 'the roof is in a terrible state of dilapidation. Some of the purlins are broken right through. It sags in places, and the rain comes in and soaks through to the rooms below. This is one of the oldest and best houses in the City, but unless something is done to repair it, it will become a ruin within the next few years'. In 1925 an attempt to schedule the building as an Ancient Monument failed because it was occupied domestically. In 1934 Worcester City Council served notice on Mr T. Allen of Bournemouth, to whom the building had passed from his grandfather. An estimate of £170 for necessary work was submitted and approved. During that year Worcestershire Archaeological Society was accepted as potential tenant. By 1936 the owner had had second thoughts about the cost and the Health and Planning Committee applied for a Demolition Order.

The Archaeological Society pressed the city to save the building and in June 1939 the Town Clerk wrote to say negotiations for purchase were proceeding satisfactorily. Negotiations struggled on during the Second World War with some councillors vociferous in favour of demolition. In October 1943 Greyfriars was saved for the Archaeological Society by its President, Major W. J. Thompson, and a trust was set up to maintain it. Mr Matley Moore, FSA, and his sister, Miss Elsie Moore, offered to

restore it at their own expense providing they could live in it for their lifetimes. In 1966 Greyfriars was given to the National Trust; its life tenants died in 1982 and 1985. Not only had the Moores furnished the house in a characterful and idiosyncratic way, but they enabled Greyfriars once again to take its part in the social life of the cathedral city and the Archaeological Society, of which Mr Matley Moore was Excursions Secretary, held its meetings in the Great Hall.

The Moores developed an enviably ideal way of living in an old cathedral city, despite the modern intrusions which overtook the lives of most of their neighbours and friends. This, part down-to-earth, part illusion, at Greyfriars was also reinforced by a delightful summer cottage, its front dominated by Moore armorials and its garden flooded for much of the year, isolated on Powick Ham by the River Teme just south of Worcester. From it Worcester appears to lie very low, dominated by the huge bulk of the cathedral. Here, with the bells ringing out over the water meadows, the Moores must have felt half-way to a medieval heaven. Now an elevated by-pass runs within yards of the cottage.

The Moores were steadfast in their efforts to save other old buildings in Worcester at a time few others would take the trouble. Miss Moore was a fine artist and needlewoman and was particularly interested in medieval tiles, monuments and wallpaintings. Mr Matley Moore has written 'The work of preserving this house has been immense, it could not have been done at a worse time for materials and labour and it has of necessity been costly: but if it had been delayed any longer the building would have been past all care. A thing of beauty from the past has been saved to give pleasure to those of the present, and it is hoped future generations who care for these things. The number of such people is growing, the number of these houses is getting less with the passage of time and neglect: all that remain are well worth saving and are far more suitable for living in under present conditions than the more stately houses of the later centuries. We are, in fact, in our ways of simpler living today, nearer to the 16th and 17th centuries than to the 18th and 19th with their more sophisticated ideas, and the work done at The Greyfriars shows that these houses can become homes again for a generation which has passed through a lot of change far greater than that time of turmoil which we call the renaissance but with which we have much in common.

'From the Battle of Bosworth to the Battle of Britain is a long time, this house has survived them both and much else. Long may it remain to show that the arts of Peace are more enduring than those of War, and that it is better to save than to destroy.'

The Courtyard. Drawing by Claude Page.

Architectural History

For much of the present century it has been assumed that the building formed a guest house or hostelry for the reception of travellers erected by the friars established next door, but it is now certain that the building was built as a private house about 1480. This is the date of the four bays fronting the street and the south range appears to be contemporary. All this has the close-studded timbering, with some notable carved embellishments, typical of a very expensive and high quality building of the period. The north range has square panel construction and is probably 16th century. The form of most of the present windows was established by the Streets, probably in the early 17th century, but these are largely reconstructions based on good evidence. It is possible the gallery was once open to the weather.

Apart from the Great Parlour which may always have been a two-bay room, most of the rooms are small and their original designations uncertain. What is certainly missing is a medieval great hall. The placing of this would have been the clue to the use of rooms close by it. Evidence elsewhere in Worcester shows that halls were generally orientated at right angles to the street, but sited behind the frontage range of buildings. However, because of the unusually wide street range at Greyfriars it is not possible to state whether the rule was followed here.

Tour of the House

The entrance to Greyfriars is a big double doorway opening from the street, wide and high enough to take a coach. A cobbled passage leads to an inner courtyard. The intermediate gates have the arms of Moore on enamelled shields. On the site of Daniel George's cottages Mr Matley Moore designed a garden: his sister chose the plants, trees and flowers. The seven terracotta pots bear the arms of Allsopp and Cheshire.

By the entrance passage, and sheltering the front door, is an unusual open porch with 15th-century moulded jambs and carved spandrels.

The Great Hall

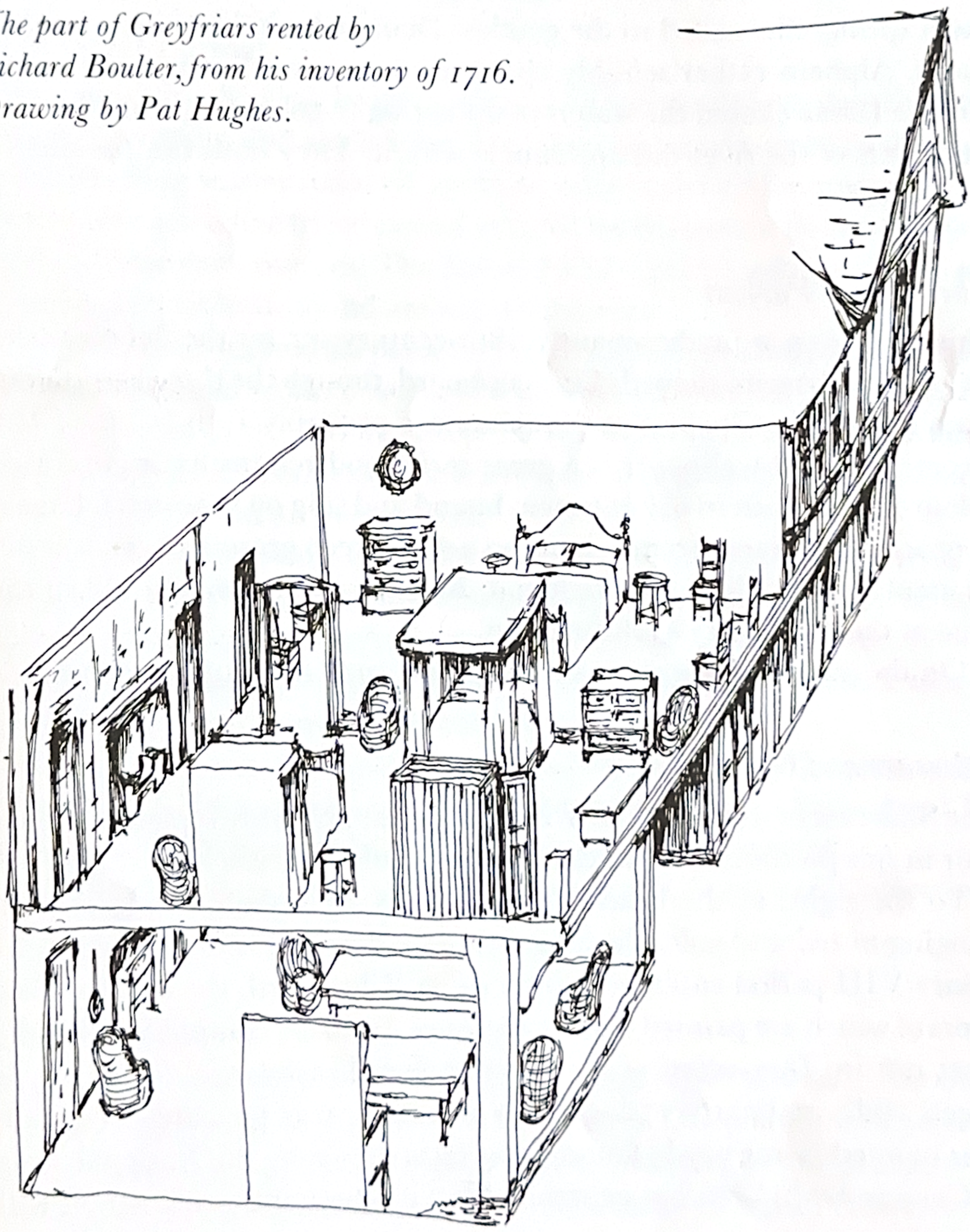
The original framed partition was only removed *c.*1920, throwing two rooms together to form the present Hall: an oak prop to support the first floor structure has had to be inserted in the middle of the room. The Georgian stone floor came from Wychbold Hall when salt-subsidence in the 1930s made it necessary for the Amphletts to abandon their ancient

house for a new one on a new site (this is now itself a ruin, which can be glimpsed, looking convincingly Georgian, from the M5 motorway at the Droitwich exit). The ancient fireplace served one of the rooms but is eccentrically placed and misleadingly suggests that only the high table end of a great hall required adequate heating. The overmantel embroidery is by Miss Moore.

The openwork screen of balusters lighting the staircase is apparently a feature introduced by the Streets in the 17th century.

The long oak high-table is early 17th century and behind it stands a carved and inlaid oak chair of about 1600 bought at the Kyre Park sale by

The part of Greyfriars rented by Richard Boulter, from his inventory of 1716. Drawing by Pat Hughes.



Mr Moore and said to have come from Hanley Childe. The dinner-bell is a 17th-century church bell on a modern belfry.

The four-fold draught screen was made up for the Moores from late 17th-century leather hangings found in a Worcester house (as noted by C. C. Oman in *The Connoisseur*, October, 1932).

The room is dominated by two tapestries. That by the entrance door is 16th-century Flemish made at Oudenarde and depicts Paul before Agrippa. That at the high table end, which has retained its original colours more brilliantly, has a much more entertaining subject: Arethusa was seen one day by the hunter Alpheus who immediately fell in love with her. To escape his pursuit, she took refuge on an island where she changed into a spring. She called to the goddess Diana who hid her in a cloud of smoke. Alpheus rather sensibly changed into a river but was outwitted because Diana caused the waters of the spring to go underground first, so the waters of the river did not mingle with it. They both ran parallel to each other!

The Yellow Parlour

This was given a predominantly 18th-century air by the Moores who introduced the semi-domed china cupboard, though the three fine Italian majolica picture tiles over the fireplace are probably 16th century. The George I period wallpaper is a great rarity and retains its original rich colouring: the pattern of huntsmen, hound and stag on flowered foliage is in opaque and transparent colours on a dark green ground over silver foil to simulate satin. Miss Moore found the paper as an unused roll in the attic at the old rectory at Birlingham.

On the mantelshelf is part of a Copeland and Garrett toilet service.

Staircase and Gallery

The Staircase in its present form is modern but probably replaces a newel stair in this position. The tapestry is 18th-century Brussels.

To the right, at the head of the stairs, is an Italian appliqué wall-hanging in red and gold. Backing on to the staircase is built in part of a Henry VIII period cupboard, formerly at Ribbesford, the oak-panelled doors of which are painted with arabesques. Its likely complicated history is set out in *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 1974. Much 16th- and early 17th-century panelling was probably originally thus painted (some newly found painting is shown by the National Trust at Canons Ashby) but has generally been inadvertently cleaned off with

all the later paint-covering when panelling has been 'restored to its original beauty'.

The lamp standard is painted in a sort of bargee's palette with which Miss Moore emphasised the interesting form of many everyday objects. She curtained the openings to the Great Parlour with linen cloth which she stencilled and painted in crimson and gold. She copied them from some 16th-century cut velvet hangings which took her fancy in the Museum of St Mark's, Venice. Mr Lees-Milne points out they introduce exactly the colour and richness of the long-vanished costly fabrics with which prosperous Tudor and Jacobean people enlivened their houses.

The Great Parlour

The longitudinal ceiling beams, carved with roll mouldings, date from the original building and make clear this room was never open to the roof. The panelling was introduced, perhaps early in the 17th century, by the Streets and has a fine frieze carved with Welsh dragons, a popular subject in these Marcher counties. The Street shield – *gules 3 catherine wheels, or a canton argent* – is to be found among the dragons.

All sign of an original fireplace for this room had been lost, so Mr Moore adapted some old work, oak inlaid with bog oak and holly, dated 1616. This had been in the Moore family for some 200 years and Mr Moore's great-grandfather used it as the back of a tester bed, but it could well have served originally as an overmantel.

The Spanish chestnut table from Berkeley Castle is 17th century and was given to the Moores by Captain Berkeley. The six-fold leather screen, probably late 17th century, is patterned in the Chinese taste. It was bought at the Brockhampton House sale after Colonel Lutley's death. The oak court cupboard is mid 17th century.

The Benjamin Leader painting was introduced in 1987, a gift to the Trust by benefactors who wish to remain anonymous. Leader lived for many years at Whittington, a village just south of Worcester.

The early 18th-century Soho tapestry depicts Arcas and Calisto in a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The Oak Bedroom

Mr Moore's bed is early 17th century, the tester much restored. The early 18th-century cradle was always in his family. The pewter wall sconces appear to be 17th century, possibly Dutch, and form an unusual set.

The glory of the room is the set of 18th-century English crewel-work

hangings. These were given to the Moores by Mr and Miss Slade-Nash, formerly of the Noke, Martley.

The Library

This houses a collection of antiquarian books, many relating to Worcestershire. The panelling was removed from a room on the ground floor where it had been covered with many layers of wallpaper. On the desk are tall brass candlesticks, probably made about 1680.

The watercolour to the right of the window is by Ursula MacDonald and shows Greyfriars just before restoration in 1946. To the left of the window is Thomas Shotter Boys' view of Friar Street in 1859.

This guide is based on that issued by Mr Matley Moore in 1951 and his unpublished notes on the furniture. It also draws on James Lees-Milne's Country Life *article of November 1969 and especially on Pat Hughes' recent research commissioned by the Trust on the ownership of the house. Her familiarity with Worcester city deeds, inventories and the inter-relationships of the once prominent families has allowed her to establish beyond reasonable doubt the identity of the original owner of Greyfriars and all his successors.*

Jeffrey Haworth, 1987

© The National Trust 1987
Reprinted 1990, 1992
Phototypeset in Monotype Lasercomp Baskerville Series 169
by Southern Positives and Negatives (SPAN), Lingfield, Surrey (5085)
Printed in England by Cylinder Graphics, London
for National Trust Enterprises Ltd